

Waste Management

Radioactive Waste Acceptance Program

Overview

The *Radioactive Waste Acceptance Program* (RWAP) ensures safe waste disposal operations at the Nevada Test Site (NTS). The NTS serves as one of the nation's approved sites for the disposal of low-level radioactive waste resulting from the cleanup of the nuclear weapons complex. Most low-level radioactive waste accepted for disposal contains small amounts of radioactivity and includes items like construction debris, trash, soil, and equipment. The U.S. Department of Energy, Nevada Operations Office (DOE/NV) manages the RWAP Program.

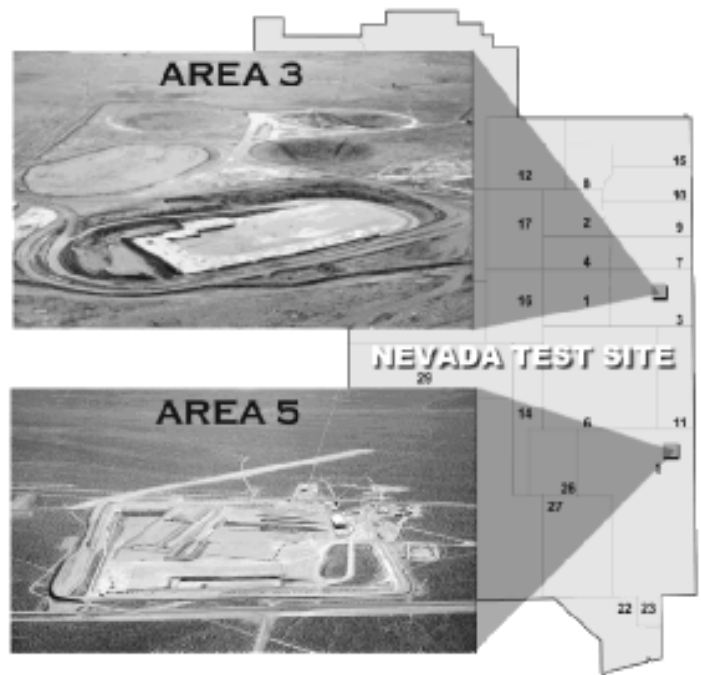
Low-level radioactive waste originates from DOE sites such as the NTS and other approved generators across the United States. Approval to ship the waste to the NTS is granted only after the waste generator certifies that the waste meets the rigorous NTS Waste Acceptance Criteria.

The NTS Waste Acceptance Criteria ensure that generators demonstrate that proposed waste does not exceed established limitations on certain contents, including free liquids, particulates, compressed gases, disease-causing or infectious agents, or explosive material. These off-site generators must also show that the waste does not qualify as "hazardous" as defined by the *Resource Conservation and Recovery Act*—a federal environmental law that defines the requirements for the management of hazardous waste. Radioactive waste that contains hazardous waste is classified as a mixed waste and is not currently accepted at the NTS from off-site generators.

Strict NTS requirements are also applied to waste packaging. These guidelines focus on the physical integrity of packages and are utilized to maintain safe disposal conditions at NTS disposal facilities. In addition, waste containers must be labeled and shipped according to U.S. Department of Transportation regulations.

Waste Acceptance Process

The waste acceptance process for the NTS begins with a waste generator's waste acceptance package. This package contains essential documentation regarding the waste being offered for disposal and includes *waste profiles*, *Quality Assurance Program Plan* documents, and a *list of personnel* who are qualified to certify low-level radioactive waste.



Low-level radioactive waste is disposed at the NTS at these two Radioactive Waste Management Sites

- **Waste profiles** provide complete descriptions of the waste, such as its physical and radiological properties and the process the generator followed to analyze these properties.
- The **Quality Assurance Program Plan** provides assurances that the generator's overall waste management program meets the NTS Waste Acceptance Criteria. A Waste Certification Official, who is independent from Waste Management budget and schedule concerns, is responsible for certifying that the waste meets the criteria. In addition, an independent quality assurance organization reviews all phases of the Waste Management program, including waste certification.
- A **list of personnel** qualified to certify low-level radioactive waste is also provided to NTS personnel. Waste shipped to the NTS is checked against these names to ensure that only waste with the proper signatures is accepted.



A Waste Certification Official completes a review of inventory sheets prior to shipment to NTS

When the NTS receives the Waste Acceptance Package and reviews the Waste Certification Program documents, a technical panel reviews the profiles. If the Waste Acceptance Package is accepted, DOE will audit the waste generator's facility through all stages of waste management, including waste generation, characterization, packaging, and shipment. If problems are identified during the audit, corrections must be made prior to DOE granting approval for waste shipment and disposal.

After approval, DOE conducts periodic facility evaluations, including audits and surveillances. Again, if problems are identified during these evaluations, generators must rectify or address them prior to DOE reapproving the generator for waste shipment and disposal. If generator programs are found to be seriously out of compliance, DOE can suspend approvals to ship at anytime.



A radiological technician surveys the exterior of a trailer transporting low-level waste

Upon arriving at the NTS Radioactive Waste Management Site, trucks carrying low-level radioactive waste are monitored to make sure external radiation levels are below required limits. After a trailer is inspected to ensure that security seals are intact, the trailer is opened and monitored for radioactivity on the inside. As a trailer is unloaded, inspectors verify the physical integrity of the waste packages and check to make sure that container labels meet requirements. Finally, the empty trailer is surveyed before it is released from the waste management site.

Summary

The DOE is committed to ensuring that low-level radioactive waste accepted for disposal at the NTS is properly characterized, certified, packaged, and transported according to safety, environmental, and transportation regulations. Waste that does not meet the waste acceptance criteria is not accepted for disposal at the NTS.

A more detailed description of the waste acceptance process is available in the NTS Waste Acceptance Criteria. This document may be found at the following web site: www.nv.doe.gov; or at the DOE/NV Public Reading Facility: 2621 Losee Road, North Las Vegas, NV 89030, (702) 295-1623.



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